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Viewing cable 09QUITO736, ECUADOR SECURITY MINISTER EXPLAINS "PERCEPTIONS"

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- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09QUITO736	2009-08-17 16:15	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/09/1/1355/cable-221121.html>

VZCZCXYZ0009
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQQT #0736/01 2291615
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171615Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0763
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 0325
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8325
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4252
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 0825
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3681
RUEHGK/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0224
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG LIMA 3366
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 2251
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0071
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 3105
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4567
RHMFSS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFSS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000736

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: TWENTY YEARS
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [EC](#) [CO](#) [XM](#) [XR](#)
SUBJECT: ECUADOR SECURITY MINISTER EXPLAINS "PERCEPTIONS"
OF U.S.-COLOMBIA MILITARY COOPERATION

REF: A. 09 QUITO 715 ...

id: 221121
date: 8/17/2009 16:15
refid: 09QUITO736
origin: Embassy Quito
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 09QUITO570|09QUITO661|09QUITO704|09QUITO715|09STATE47202|09STATE82581
header:
VZCZCXYZ0009
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQQT #0736/01 2291615
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171615Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0763
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 0325
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8325
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4252
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RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4567
RHMFIISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000736

SIPDIS

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REF: A. 09 QUITO 715
[B.](#) 09 STATE 82581
[C.](#) 09 QUITO 704
[D.](#) 09 QUITO 661
[E.](#) 09 QUITO 570
[F.](#) 09 STATE 47202

Classified By: Ambassador Heather M. Hodges for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: During his visit to attend President Correa's August 10 inauguration ceremony, DAS Christopher McMullen met with Security Minister Miguel Carvajal and MFA Under Secretary Jorge Orbe regarding the ongoing negotiation of a U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement. McMullen provided assurances that the DCA did not represent a threat to Ecuador or any other country in the region. Likewise, the proposed agreement did not expand the U.S. military presence in Colombia; rather, it simply sought to formalize existing ad hoc arrangements that have provided U.S. access to Colombian bases for a number of years. Carvajal expressed Ecuador's concern about Colombia's intentions in the region and rejected the suggestion that GOE rhetoric on the issue was anti-U.S. As a practical matter, McMullen suggested that, rather than communicating via the media, the U.S. and Ecuadorian embassies, as well as the U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Dialogue, were more appropriate channels for discussion of issues such as the Colombia DCA. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On August 7, the MFA accepted WHA Deputy Assistant Secretary Christopher McMullen's offer to discuss ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and Colombia regarding a Defense Cooperation Agreement. Although the MFA told us the meeting would be with Under Secretary of Bilateral Affairs Jorge Orbe, upon arrival at the MFA the Coordinating Minister of Internal and External Security, Miguel Carvajal, and two of his under secretaries unexpectedly joined the meeting and led the discussion on behalf of the GOE. DCM and PolOff, as well as MFA North America desk officer, also attended the meeting.

NO INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING U.S. BASES

¶3. (C) In explaining the Colombia DCA negotiations, DAS McMullen made the following points:

-- the U.S. has no plans to establish U.S. military bases in Colombia;

-- the DCA negotiations aim at formalizing existing ad hoc arrangements that have provided access to Colombian bases on an informal basis for many years;

-- the U.S. seeks access primarily to three air bases, including Palanquero, Apiai, and Barranquilla (although the latter largely for emergency or logistical purposes);

-- the local Colombian commanders would retain control of these bases;

-- the U.S. military presence in Colombia has been diminishing in recent years and will continue to do so as the U.S. transfers key counter-narcotics and security programs to Colombian control;

-- the U.S. goal is to return eventually to pre-Plan Colombia levels of security assistance, a process that reflects Colombia's increasing capabilities to combat the FARC and other illegal armed groups;

-- the purpose of this DCA is to deepen and modernize existing security cooperation, most of which date back to the Cold War era and are no longer relevant to the current realities and challenges that we face, particularly transnational threats such as narco-terrorism in Colombia.

TRANSFERRING CN AND SECURITY PROGRAMS; REDUCING US MILITARY

FOOTPRINT

¶4. (C) DAS McMullen explained that the U.S. has already begun transferring the control of security and counter-narcotics programs to the GOC, which has demonstrated the capability to sustain these programs. He noted that USG assistance to Colombia would eventually return to what it had been prior to Plan Colombia. He said that with a gradual reduction of U.S. security assistance over the coming years, the U.S. would likely reduce the number of military personnel in Colombia. He pointed out that while the U.S. congressional limit on the number of military personnel in Colombia was 800, an average of less than 300 had been present in Colombia the last several years.

COLOMBIAN BASES ARE NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR MANTA FOL

¶5. (C) McMullen pointed out that U.S. discussions with Colombia regarding formalizing access to Colombian bases had begun well before the GOE's announcement that it would not renew the agreement for U.S. access to the Forward Operating Location (FOL) in Manta, Ecuador. He added that the access to Colombian bases would not replace the capabilities that were lost with the closure of the Manta FOL. He noted that the Colombian bases were in the interior of the country, far

from the Eastern Pacific where maritime narco-trafficking was taking place.

ECUADOR HAS ITS DOUBTS

¶ 6. (C) Minister Carvajal interjected that Ecuador had a "distinct perception" regarding the U.S. military presence in Colombia, and that others in the region shared Ecuador's concern. He said the announcement that the U.S. would use Colombian bases came as a big surprise, just as the reactivation of the Fourth Fleet for use in counternarcotics had been a surprise. McMullen countered that the Fourth Fleet's mission was not counternarcotics; it was primarily humanitarian in nature.

¶ 7. (C) Carvajal pressed on, stating that Ecuador seriously doubted Colombia's commitment to combating the FARC and narco-trafficking. He stated that Ecuador's key issue was that Colombia had not provided a guarantee that there would be no more attacks on Ecuadorian soil; if it did so, all else would be negotiable. He then cited several reasons why the GOE mistrusts and doubts Colombia's intentions:

-- March 1, 2008, Colombian bombing of a FARC camp in Ecuadorian territory.

-- Excessive investment by the USG in Colombia via Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota.

-- Imbalance in the size of Colombia's military compared to other countries in the region.

-- Lack of reduction in the production of cocaine in Colombia. Carvajal asserted that despite USG assistance, Colombia still had 90 million hectares of coca, whereas Ecuador had none.

-- Years of damage to licit crops in Ecuador caused by aerial eradication along the border, with no compensation to Ecuadorians affected by the spraying.

-- Minimal presence of Colombian security forces along Colombia's border with Ecuador. Carvajal stated that Colombia had only 3,000 troops and five bases (two permanent and three mobile) along its border, whereas Ecuador had 7,000 military and 3,000 police personnel and four times the number of bases.

-- Colombia's ongoing media campaign to discredit Ecuador. Carvajal cited the Mono Jojoy video (Ref D) as an example, calling the video a fake.

-- Lack of Colombian assistance in assisting approximately 135,000 Colombian refugees currently in Ecuador.

DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THREAT

¶ 8. (C) Responding to Carvajal's question on why Colombia did not station more of its troops along its border with Ecuador, McMullen said that it would be best to ask Colombia directly regarding its strategy, and expressed hope that Ecuador would improve its relations with Colombia. McMullen added that Colombia was engaged in a difficult conflict with the FARC, ELN and other armed groups, and had suffered greatly from their brutal tactics. In recent years, the GOC has made impressive progress in the fight against these illegal armed groups. He then drew a contrast with Venezuela, noting that the GOV had increased its military strength even though it did not face a similar threat. Carvajal quickly responded that Venezuela's threat was Colombia.

CARVAJAL DOWNPLAYS HARSH ANTI-U.S. RHETORIC

¶ 9. (C) McMullen noted that Ecuador had been a good partner in

the fight against narcotrafficking, and said he had been surprised by President Correa and other GOE officials' harsh rhetoric calling the U.S. military presence in Colombia a "provocation." He observed that the accusations were even less understandable considering the Ambassador's August 4 assurances to Foreign Minister Falconi (Ref C), as well as President Obama's recent remarks stating clearly that there would be no U.S. bases in Colombia, that the U.S. would not control Colombian bases, and that the purpose of our presence in Colombia was to continue the fight against narcotrafficking. Carvajal denied that the GOE had used any inappropriate rhetoric, justifying his assessment by saying that the GOE had not used derogatory terms such as "yankee" when referring to President Obama.

FINDING A COMMON WAY FORWARD

¶10. (C) Focusing the conversation back on practical matters, DAS McMullen stressed that Ecuador and the U.S. were partners in counternarcotics cooperation. He pointed out that although the Manta FOL agreement had not been renewed, the U.S. was hopeful regarding Ecuador's ongoing review of the "Gas and Go" proposal, which might allow U.S. planes to fly anti-drug missions out of Guayaquil's airport (Refs E and F).

Returning to the DCA issue, McMullen explained that the USG had not consulted with Ecuador or other countries because it was bilateral in nature; the negotiations with Colombia were ongoing, so we could not predict the final form of the agreement; and the DCA does not break new ground, it would merely formalize existing cooperation. He said that had the GOE asked for information regarding the issue, prior to making public accusations, the USG would have responded immediately (as was done at the request of the Brazilian Embassy in Washington). He suggested that Embassy Quito and Ecuador's Embassy in Washington were the appropriate channels for requesting this type of information. MFA Under Secretary Orbe suggested the OAS as a forum to discuss the issue. McMullen countered that the U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Dialogue would be a more appropriate forum for discussion of Ecuador's security concerns vis-a-vis U.S. security cooperation with Colombia.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) This meeting was useful in airing the frank views of both sides regarding U.S.-Colombian negotiations on the DCA. While Carvajal recognized the importance of sharing information and perspectives, he was mostly interested in communicating the GOE's concerns to the USG. It is clear that the GOE's mistrust of Colombia will continue to affect its views of U.S.-Colombian security cooperation. In the absence of any formal bilateral mechanism between Ecuador and Colombia, and in response to Foreign Minister Falconi's suggestion to the Ambassador (Ref C), the U.S. might be able to play a useful role in facilitating communication between the GOE and Colombia, although the personal bad blood between Correa and Uribe will ultimately limit the extent to which the U.S. can resolve this vexing bilateral dispute.

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS McMullen.

HODGES

=====CABLE ENDS=====